

## Deadline

Daniel Emmett took his inspiration from weather. Took it from another man's pen. Purported to write Dixie on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1859. Leaned into the breeze. Took note of clouds shifting and slowly a refrain cracked like lightning between them. Like ghosts placed this very song into his mouth, fed it to him, line by line, until his pen stopped moving and his lips started forming each simple word, and they became his own.

\* \* \*

Or perhaps Daniel Emmett was on deadline to write a walk-around.

He was on deadline and remembered a song the African-American family in his Ohio town used to sing.

He was on deadline and uninspired. He recalled. He re-called. He wrote what wasn't as his own.

The word *deadline* has its origins in the Civil War. Andersonville Prison. The deadline: wooden posts along the perimeter, a gun at the ready for those who ventured too close.

Bodies piled up near the deadline.

\* \* \*

In that absent prison: history. In all our prisons. We lock away our stories, lock away our storied. Our storied past.

At Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 1822, at midnight, 35 people were hanged for planning a slave rebellion. The original church set up in flames.

On the afternoon of June 17, 2015, there was a song, a humming no one knew. A simple whistle, a longing they thought they imagined. *Open the window and let out the noise.* Sometimes the noise is coming from right beside you.

\* \* \*

They accepted a stranger into the circle as easy as that, pushed back their chairs. Made the space wide. Made the circle wide. Made the room wide. Wide, Why'd.

193 years to the day of the slave rebellion, nine people were massacred in Bible Study.

Clementa, Myra, Ethel Lee, Susi, Cynthia, Depayne, Sharonda, Daniel, Tywanza. A librarian. A senator. A track coach. A pastor. A pastor. A speech therapist. A student, friend, aunt, nephew, sister, brother.

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*Deadline* is a printing term, a workday term, a prison term.  
Black and brown bodies in fear.

Deadlines crisscross this country  
from Charleston to Andersonville to Baton Rouge to Walkerville. From Cleveland and Detroit to Orlando and Guantanamo.

Sometimes the noise is coming from right beside you.